

**CHICAGO, IL** - U.S. Representatives Rahm Emanuel (D-IL) and Mark Kirk today unveiled the Great Lakes Restoration Fund, bipartisan legislation with 15 cosponsors each representing congressional districts in Great Lakes states. The bill establishes a funding source through block grants for Lakes restoration and revitalization, and outlines a vision for the Great Lakes future in the form of a Comprehensive Lakes Management Plan.

"Thirty years after passage of the U.S. Clean Water Act, Great Lakes water quality has improved, but the Lakes remain unhealthy for wildlife and people and there is clear and convincing evidence that the ecosystem is deteriorating," Emanuel said. "This plan would restore and preserve the Lakes for future generations of Americans."

"My top environmental goal in Congress is to protect Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes," said Congressman Kirk. "For too long the federal government has ignored the Great Lakes, while its ecosystem continues to be threatened by pollution and invasive species. Addressing the environmental challenges the Great Lakes face through the Great Lakes Restoration fund will lay the foundation for safe drinking water, habitat preservation and recreation for our children."

Holding one-fifth of the world's fresh surface water supply and nine-tenths of the U.S. supply, the Great Lakes and their connecting channels form the largest freshwater system on Earth. Case in point: there were a record 897 beach closings in 2002 on Lake Michigan alone. In addition, 20% of the Great Lakes shoreline contains polluted sediments, and state and local authorities have issued more than 1,500 fish consumption advisories in the Great Lakes.

Clearly in crisis, the Great Lakes are the source of drinking water for 28 million people. In the late 1990s, the Everglades, the source of freshwater for much of the state of Florida, faced a similar threat. Congress responded with a restoration effort.

"Today, the level of funding for Lakes restoration is woefully inadequate," Emanuel explained. "In addition, we don't have a clear idea of which programs are the most effective and should be strengthened. This bill allows us, through a deliberate process, to develop a clear vision for the Great Lakes while immediately tackling some of the most pressing issues."

The legislation would give states restoration funding in the form of block grants, authorizing \$4 billion over 5 years, or \$800 million each year. Money is allocated to states by a formula that takes into account criteria such as population, exposure to the Great Lakes Watershed, number of Areas of Concern and critical habitat.

In order to qualify for funding, states would be required to develop a state management plan. The state plan would be approved by the EPA Administrator and must comply with the President's "Great Lakes Strategy 2002" and appropriate Lakewide Management Plans.

In addition to providing restoration funding, the bill would create a Great Lakes Advisory Board. Comprised of the governors of the Great Lakes states, representatives of the federal government, local mayors, as well as the business, scientific and advocacy communities, the board would be tasked with developing a Comprehensive Lakes Management Plan. This plan would build on the existing catalog of Great Lakes research to provide a clear vision of the Lakes' future. Further, the plan would review the value of current restoration efforts and recommend to Congress and states which programs should be strengthened, combined, or eliminated altogether.

The Fund would also:

- Ensure the economic and ecologic sustainability of the Lakes;
- Clean up toxic hot spots;
- Combat invasive species;
- Control pollution from urban and agricultural runoff;
- Restore and conserve wetlands and critical coastal habitat; and
- Increase public education of Great Lakes issues.

"The Great lakes need continued support from Congress to correct years of contamination to this indispensable natural resource," said Congressman Kirk. "The Great Lakes Restoration fund is a big step toward making contaminated sites like Waukegan Harbor in Illinois, Green Bay in Wisconsin and others safe harbors for fish, wildlife and recreational users."

"Congressman Emanuel and I have personally spoken with the President about this issue and are looking forward to working with the White House in the coming weeks to coordinate our policy with the administration and create a strong bi-partisan consensus on preserving and protecting this ecosystem."

The House cosponsors (14) include:

Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Chris Chocola (R-IN), Phil English (R-PA), Mark Green (R-WI), Pete Hoekstra (R-MI), Mark Kirk (R-IL), Gerald Kleczka (D-WI), Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH), Betty McCollum (D-MN), John Murtha (D-PA), Tom Reynolds (R-NY), Louise Slaughter (D-NY), Bart Stupak (D-MN), and Pete Visclosky (D-IN).